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ABSTRACT

A study examined whether "Sports Illustrated" offers a biased view of the sports world by focusing primarily on the eastern teams. The units of analysis were articles about Major League baseball appearing in the "Sports Illustrated" issues from late April to early October in the years 1975 to 1984. The teams were divided into three geographic regions: the east, the midwest, and the west. When the overall number of stories per division was analyzed, the eastern division contained the fewest number of teams, seven, and yet still received a greater combined total of stories (153 out of 409). When the subject and content of the stories were analyzed, the eastern teams also received the extra feature stories. In contrast, the stories about non-eastern teams consisted primarily of the team's or a single player's outstanding performance of that week or month and fluctuations in their division pennant race. A third analysis revealed that when stories are written about the non-eastern teams, they are often placed in discrete areas of the magazine. The majority of the articles about the eastern teams appeared as feature stories in the front. The study did not argue against the quality of the reporting done, but simply questioned the fairness of the coverage for each team and in the subjects reported. (MG)

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Magazine Division

"Sports Illustrated: Is Every Team Treated Equally"

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SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

Is every team treated equally?

Where can you go to get the most complete coverage of the most up-to-date sports issues? Where can you go to get reports on all the sports teams across the nation and not just those teams located in your area? Where can you go to get articles on a wide variety of sports and not just a focus on one sport in particular? Sports Illustrated magazine presents itself as being an answer to all these questions and in addition, offering it all in one place. Sports Illustrated markets itself as a weekly publication offering thorough coverage of the major sports activities, as well as, additional coverage of the less publicized sports. A Sports Illustrated prototype in 1954, declared "...at last, America will have a great National Sports Weekly."

Does Sports Illustrated live up to these expectations? Using Major League baseball as the unit of analysis, this paper will show that in actuality Sports Illustrated offers a biased view of the sports world by focusing primarily on the eastern teams. This east coast bias has been found by others studying the national media. Two analyses of Time and Newsweek, by Herbert Gans and David Shaw, both note the tendency of New York-based editors and writers to give New York area stories much more play than ones in other regions of the country.

The bias toward eastern teams occurs in three different areas. The first is in the amount of stories given per team in the east versus the number of stories given per team for the remaining

teams. The east clearly receives the greater number of articles. The second distortion occurs in the content of the articles written. The non-eastern teams typically only receive stories about their performance or outstanding play by one of their team members. On the other hand, eastern teams receive "performance articles" as well as "extra" stories or in other words, human interest stories. Finally, the third area of bias results in a poor placement of stories covering non-eastern teams, while eastern teams appear in the headlines on a regular basis.

The procedures of this paper need to be detailed. The first step in the research was determining which issues of Sports Illustrated should be used in the analysis. It was decided that the pre-season articles were irrelevant because they were the result of the hype created by odds makers and not based on performance itself. Post-season articles were also omitted from the analysis due to the fact that reporters had no choice on whom to cover, they had to report on those teams in the playoffs and the World Series. As a result of these deletions the final units of analysis were articles about Major League baseball appearing in the Sports Illustrated issues from late April to early October of the ten year period from 1975 to 1984. The second step of research was to go through each issue of the magazine and record each story that covered an aspect of Major League baseball concerning a team or person representing a team (i.e. players, managers, owners, alumni). The date, subject and placement were recorded for each story. Once all of the articles were recorded the next step was to divide the

teams into geographic regions. Three regions resulted from this division, the east, the midwest, and the west. These divisions were made on the basis of the teams geographical location. The resulting divisions looked like this:

<u>East</u>	<u>Midwest</u>	<u>West</u>
New York Yankees	Cincinnati Reds	Seattle Mariners
New York Mets	Cleveland Indians	Oakland A's
Boston Red Sox	Milwaukee Brewers	California Angels
Baltimore Orioles	Detroit Tigers	Los Angeles Dodgers
Philadelphia Phillies	Chicago Cubs	San Diego Padres
Atlanta Braves *	Chicago White Sox	San Francisco Giants
Pittsburgh Pirates *	Kansas City Royals	Montreal Expos *
	Minnesota Twins	Toronto Blue Jays *
	Texas Rangers	
	St. Louis Cardinals	
	Houston Astros	

* denotes teams that are not definite division types, but placed in division closest to geographical location.

The fourth step in the research was to go through the recorded stories and chart how many articles each team received during each year. The table appearing as Figure 1 on page 4 is the result of this procedure. The final step was to collect all the data together and start the analysis and report the results in the arguments that follow.

My first point of contention is the pure dominance of the east in the total number of stories written in the ten-year period. On the average the seven eastern teams were each covered eight more times in ten years than any of the teams in the other two divisions.

Figure 1
NUMBER OF STORIES PER TEAM PER YEAR

	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	Total
New York Yankees	5	3	6	7	2	4	2	3	2	3	38
New York Mets	4	2	2	1	1	2	1	1	2	3	19
Boston Red Sox	5	4	1	4	3	1	1	3	3	1	26
Baltimore Orioles	3	5	2	0	3	3	1	3	3	1	24
Philadelphia Phillies	2	5	2	2	3	2	1	2	2	1	22
Atlanta Braves	0	1	3	3	0	0	0	2	2	0	11
Pittsburgh Pirates	2	1	2	0	1	3	0	2	2	0	<u>13</u>
											153
Cincinnati Reds	3	3	4	3	2	2	1	3	1	2	24
Cleveland Indians	1	1	0	1	0	2	1	1	0	1	8
Milwaukee Brewers	1	1	0	1	2	1	2	2	2	2	14
Detroit Tigers	1	2	2	2	1	1	0	1	1	4	15
Chicago Cubs	2	1	1	1	3	0	0	2	0	4	14
Chicago White Sox	1	0	2	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	8
Kansas City Royals	2	2	0	3	1	3	2	2	2	1	18
Minnesota Twins	1	2	2	2	1	1	0	1	0	3	13
Texas Rangers	3	2	0	2	0	1	0	0	2	0	10
St. Louis Cardinals	1	0	2	1	2	2	0	1	2	1	12
Houston Astros	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	0	<u>12</u>
											148
Seattle Mariners	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	0	1	7
Oakland A's	2	2	1	1	2	1	2	2	2	1	16
California Angels	3	1	3	1	4	0	1	2	2	2	19
Los Angeles Dodgers	1	1	1	4	1	2	2	1	2	1	16
San Diego Padres	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	3	1	3	17
San Francisco Giants	0	2	1	3	0	1	0	0	1	2	10
Montreal Expos	0	1	1	0	1	1	3	1	1	2	11
Toronto Blue Jays	0	0	1	1	1	2	0	2	3	2	<u>12</u>
											108

The east "division" contains the fewest number of teams at seven and yet still received a greater combined total of stories (153) than either of the other divisions. The midwest division had four more teams to make eleven and received 148 stories combined. The west had eight teams and grouped together received 108 stories in ten years. The east division received the greatest stories per team per ten-year period average at 21.86, whereas the midwest received an average of 13.45 stories per team per ten years and the west was only slightly better at an average of 13.50 stories per team for ten years.

Although these numbers represent the abundance of coverage on the east, what are the implications of these numbers? My first assumption was that teams that won their divisions would net the most coverage. After dividing the stories by team (Figure 1) it became apparent that this was not the case. The top three teams in terms of the number of stories they received were the New York Yankees, Boston Red Sox and the Baltimore Orioles. These three teams are in the same division, the American League East, proving my theory false. There obviously isn't equal coverage of the divisions and their winners when the top three teams receiving stories come from the same division.

Even in the cases where these teams did win their divisions the coverage was still distributed unevenly. Take 1978 for example, the New York Yankees won their division and received seven stories during that year. No other division winner obtained this quantity of coverage. The team who came closest to this amount of coverage

was the Los Angeles Dodgers, who received four stories while winning the National League West division. The other two division winners, the Kansas City Royals and the Philadelphia Phillies, earned just three stories each during that year. Sports Illustrated covered the Yankees much more extensively than any of the other division winners. To make this point even stronger we can look at the Boston Red Sox. During 1978 Boston finished second in their division behind the Yankees and yet still received the same amount of stories as the Dodgers at four. The Red Sox's received more coverage than two of the division winners. Another example of this bias comes during 1982. The Milwaukee Brewers won the American League East after leading since late July. During that victory year the Brewers only received two stories. Three eastern teams; the Red Sox, Orioles and the Yankees, each received more attention by having three stories a piece written on their behalf. Boston and Baltimore finished second and third respectively, while New York received greater coverage than the winner in a year in which they finished sixth. The Texas Rangers, on the other hand, finished sixth in the American League West that same year and failed to have one story written about their team. No matter where they finished in their division the eastern teams couldn't lose in their coverage.

If the Yankees are finishing sixth in their division and still receiving coverage, reporters obviously are not reporting on their record or performance. The subject and content of such stories form my second argument. The eastern teams receive the "extra" feature stories or those having to deal with subjects other than their

performance or record, for example an article on the history of Yankee Stadium. In contrast, the non-eastern teams stories consist primarily of the teams or a single player's outstanding performance of that week or month, specifically rises in their divisions pennant race. In the 1982 issues described earlier, in which Milwaukee won their division, both of the Brewers articles concerned their peak performance. One was for the teams' drive for the lead using home runs and the other was on Robin Yount's outstanding performance at shortstop which won him the American League Most Valuable Player Award for that year. Conversely, the New York Yankee features were human interest stories, such as what Yankee owner George Steinbrenner was doing to keep his team out of trouble. Not one story mentioned the team's poor performance.

To validate this point consider the 1978 season coverage. Do the equations winners equal performance stories and losers equal human interest stories hold true for this year? No. The Yankees won their division and received an astounding seven stories. According to our equation and following previous examples these stories should cover the Yankees performance during their rise to the top. This seems to be correct. Sports Illustrated provided us with performance accounts on both the team's and the players' success, such as Ron Guidry's eleven game winning streak. Where this year differs from 1982 is in the fact that the losers didn't get the human interest stories, the Yankees got those too. Two feature articles, including one cover story, dealt with the subject of Billy Martin's resignation as manager of the Yankees. I do not disagree that this is

newsworthy, but I feel that two feature articles in two weeks is a little extensive for the issue at hand. I would argue that if the manager for Cleveland or either Chicago team resigned the coverage of the event would not have been as great as that given to Billy Martin.

Another example of certain eastern teams receiving the majority of the non-race-related stories came in 1981 when the players decided to go on strike in mid-June and didn't resume play until the beginning of August. During this strike-shortened season there wasn't a lot of extra time to have all of the extra feature stories that are normally used to fill in when the season dragged on. The only stories Sports Illustrated had time to carry were those relating to the division races. As a result you will see a fairly even distribution across the divisions in the number of stories given each team. The eastern teams did not receive their domination when the coverage was restricted to the division races, so it follows that their dominant coverage is a result of the quantity of feature stories they receive.

A second dimension to the content bias lies in what the writers have chosen not to cover. This paper has primarily discussed the dominant choice of covering the eastern teams, but it also needs to be noted what events were being ignored as a result of these choices. Two similar events occurred during the 1977 season which will represent this issue quite plainly. During the week of May 16 Kansas City Royals pitcher Jim Colborn threw the first no-hitter of the season. Unfortunately Sports Illustrated didn't

recognize this feat as being newsworthy enough to merit a story. The only mention of the event was in a box approximately 1" X 2 1/2" which appeared amongst the division summaries of the week's action. What story did Sports Illustrated feel was more newsworthy than Colborn's superb performance? The baseball article that week was given to Atlanta Braves owner Ted Turner discussing why he was being banned from the team's bench. This article wasn't on another player or team, but an eastern owner had beat out an event which probably only takes place on the average of two to three times a year. Later in June of the same season another no-hitter was thrown, this time by Dennis Eckersley of the Cleveland Indians. Once again this was only mentioned in a 1" X 2 1/2" box within the division summaries. What was the article this time that left a no-hitter unmentioned? Nothing. The June 13, 1977 Sports Illustrated contained no story covering a Major League baseball team or player. Dennis Eckersley's no-hitter did not lose out to a greater sports story, it was just judged as being unworthy of a separate story. No matter what the midwest teams did they failed to get recognized by Sports Illustrated.

Obviously there are stories written on non-eastern teams. I do not mean to imply that there is an absolute boycott of the nineteen non-eastern teams. My third argument however, is when these stories are written they are placed in discrete areas of the magazine.

In order to present this point in the clearest fashion, the format of Sports Illustrated needs to be discussed. Each week

Sports Illustrated presents five or six "feature" stories which receive headlines and descriptions on the contents page. Along with these stories were the standard sections in every issue titled as baseball, letters, college hockey, etc. on the contents page. No descriptions were given for these sections so one needs to flip to the page to see what the section is about. Specifically if you would turn to the baseball section you would find an article, usually on some player or teams performance during that week, leading off followed by summaries separated by division detailing the action during the week. When the stories were recorded for the ten year period the articles which appeared in this baseball section in the back were circled so they could be distinguished from those appearing as headline stories and receiving descriptions in the front.

After analyzing the data it became apparent that the eastern teams were once again heavily favored: the majority of their articles appear as feature stories in the front. The New York Yankees received an amazing 38 stories over the ten year period. An even more astounding fact is that of those 38 stories only seven of them appeared in the generic baseball section, or in other words 81.6% of their articles appeared in headlines. Similarly the Philadelphia Phillies had 72.7% (16 out of 22) of their articles show up in the headlined section. On the other hand, the San Diego Padres had 10 out of 17 (58.8%) of their articles appear in the back and even worse was the Chicago White Sox who had 62.5% (5 out of 8) of their articles appear in the depths of the magazine. Numbers such as these clearly indicate that although Sports Illustrated covered the

other teams, it put those stories in an area where no one would find it during a quick glance through the magazine. The visibility of the feature articles and the domination of the eastern teams in these articles makes those teams seem much more important and newsworthy.

After a content analysis was conducted of the baseball coverage in the Sports Illustrated magazine from April 1975 to October 1984 a tilting toward the eastern teams became quite obvious. The bias occurred in three areas; total number of stories per team, content of the articles, and the placement of these articles. In all three of these areas the eastern teams came out heavily favored. The distortion is subtle. It is not obvious in a single issue analysis, but over a ten year span the eastern domination is very evident. This paper doesn't argue against the quality of the reporting done, but simply questions the fairness of the coverage for each team and in the subjects reported. In "Deciding What's News" Herbert Gans discusses the "New York Bias." This phenomena refers to a publishers attempt to downplay New York stories to compensate for their New York location. Unfortunately for all of us Sports Illustrated is not successful in avoiding this "New York Bias."